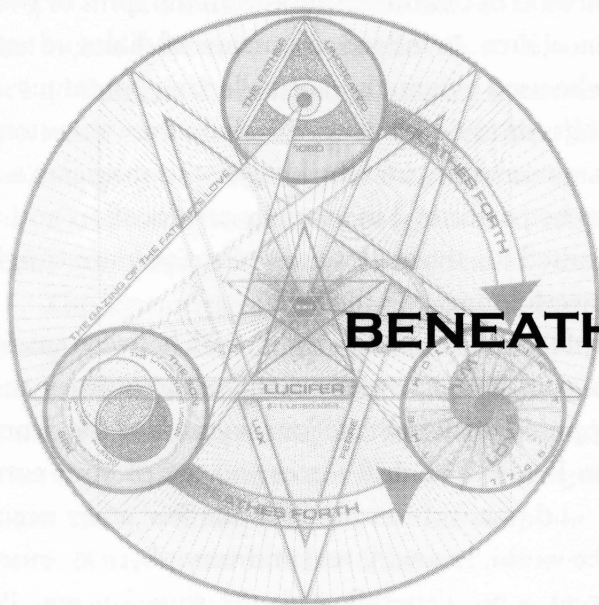




BENEATH THE PAVEMENT, THE BEAST

STEPHEN GRASSO

Magic is not located in textbooks available on the high street, it does not exist within codified and rehearsed ritual and you can't buy it on your credit card. Magic is a ferocious and mysterious beast, and its secrets and powers must be earned through blood, sweat and tears. It is something that you live, not something that you read about and study. Magic is everywhere and within everything, and the work of a magician is to perceive it and to interact with it. There is magic in the sea at night, in a flight of ravens, in the motion of traffic, in dark alleys, filthy sewers and bright shop doorways. There is magic in abandoned subway stations, riverbanks and public parks. The world is alive with magic. Are you brave enough to step outside and into it?

The term *dérive*, or "drift," was first coined by the Situationist International, who would go for long aimless walks around their towns and cities, reimagining the concrete tower blocks, cenotaphs and public fountains as castles of wisdom, wishing spikes and ponds of eternal youth. The purpose of the drift was to see beauty in the urban landscape and to conquer the tyranny of grim, oppressive town planning through the transformative power of the imagination. Through the technique of the drift, the Situationists could radically change their experience of the city and turn drab stretches of urban decay into a magical landscape of limitless wonder and enchantment. Yet they perhaps stopped short of taking the exercise to its logical conclusion.

Once you have peeled back the dreary concrete mask of the world and uncovered a magical kingdom crawling with spirits, the next stage is to see what you can do within that world, to work out how to speak to those spirits and find out what they might be

able to do for you. The technique of the drift does not merely reveal magic, but is a process of engaging with it. It has many different applications and can be used in a variety of contexts. It can be used as a direct method of communication with the spirit or *genus loci* of a particular location or geographical area, or indeed as a means of dialogue with any entity you are working with. It can be used as a method of collecting potent ingredients and materials for sorcery workings, or to seek answers to divinatory questions. The practical applications of the drift are numerous, and the imaginative magician will undoubtedly unlock many more. It can be performed in virtually any location and at a moment's notice; hence it is ideally suited for those situations when you are caught unprepared and need to work some powerful magic on the fly.

The mechanics of the drift are simple. You are attempting to walk between worlds and bring something useful back with you. It is essentially a shamanic journey that takes place physically in real time, as opposed to an internal journey such as the drum-led trances of indigenous tribes like the Jivaro. The drift forces you out of your comfortable centrally heated temple space and puts you on the spot like few other occult practices. It gets your magic out into the world, in a very real and very physical sense.

A drift can begin in several different ways, depending on the situation and the intent. Sometimes drifts can be spontaneous. If you have sufficiently internalized the practice, it's not uncommon to find yourself kicked into a full-on shamanic drift at virtually any moment. Going out to buy a pint of milk, walking home from the pub or visiting the shops can often be transformed into heavy magic without a minute's notice. The spontaneous drift can sharpen up your sensitivity and adaptability to a very high degree, but to get the best from it, you need to be able to receive and filter "information" in an effective manner. The drift is a high-risk occult practice as far as your sanity goes, as it encourages a scary level of openness to spirit communication. Before you know it, you're the mad guy speaking with invisible beings on the high street and going through the bins looking for occult secrets. That kind of thing is pretty much par for the course with this sort of work, so to begin with, it's useful to learn a method of switching it on and off.

It's important to remember that what you are doing is attempting to "walk between worlds"—with an emphasis on the word "between." It's relatively easy to go off into the deep end with this practice and become a paranoid lunatic remarkably quickly, but that's not the point of the exercise. It's your skill as a magician that allows you to safely navigate the wilder areas of consciousness and bring back something useful. To become accomplished at the drift, you have to develop sufficient skill at mediating between your normal day-to-day existence and the hyper-real shamanic experience.

In order to begin the drift, you should look for an appropriate starting place—a physical access point that will allow you to enter into shamanic reality and return again when your business is done. The most immediate and accessible crossover point into shamanic reality is, of course, the crossroads. Every inhabited location will have

a crossroads of one form or another within walking distance, and the crossroads is the supreme symbol of intercession between the worlds. However, any work involving the crossroads falls firmly within the territory of the various Gods, Goddesses, Saints, Spirits and Mysteries associated with it. You need to ask their permission before you can go through the gate. This is easier to accomplish if you already have a working relationship with one or more of these entities. The general *modus operandi* would be to make appropriate offerings to them at their spot and ask if they will open the doorway for you, allowing you to go through and accomplish the intent of your drift. You should seek their blessing for your journey and ask them to ensure your safe return.

The mysteries of the crossroads are essential to the operation of this work. Although it's possible to begin a shamanic drift in a more freeform style, utilizing a physical crossover point such as a gateway, railway arch, narrow alleyway or similar symbolic route, these structures still fall under the domain of the crossroads at an esoteric level. Therefore if the entire operation is performed under the specific auspices of a crossroads entity, with both their permission and their involvement, you are likely to get far more effective results. Once offerings have been made and permission has been granted, you can begin the drift. Depart from your access point, either walking through the gateway/arch or leaving the crossroads in a different direction to which you arrived. You are now entering shamanic reality.

In the early stages of the drift you should begin tuning into your environment. Pay close attention to what's going on around you and try to read the language of the city, or wherever you may be. Look out for any strange graffiti, headlines on discarded newspaper, unusual words or phrases that leap out at you from otherwise innocuous sources, and so on. Pay attention to snatches of overheard conversation, the lyrics of songs echoing from car radios, or announcements from train stations and the like. You are looking for a sign or signal that can be readily interpreted in relation to your intent. Don't try to force it or just make something up to fit. Relax into the drift and wait for something to come through of its own accord. The process of the drift is a two-way dialogue with the spirits. You might have to be patient, but you will know when you're on the right track.

The first piece of information that comes through will either answer your question right off the bat, or else it will lead you on to the next stage in your journey. Sometimes drifts can be resolved very quickly—for example, within minutes of leaving the access point, you see a random piece of street art that answers your question in no uncertain terms. If this happens, then simply return to the crossroads, thank the spirits and ask them to close the door for you. Sometimes it's that simple. Frequently, however, the first signal that you receive will point you somewhere else, or only give you part of the story, leading you further down the road to look for more clues.

You should eventually start to get a sense that you are following a symbolic thread through the city. Each sign you receive brings you a little further towards your even-

tual destination and the realization of your intent. Sometimes you might lose the plot completely and find yourself clueless as to where you ought to go. If this happens, just relax and tune back in. Try to pick up the thread again and get back on the right track. Occasionally the spirits might throw you a curveball. For example, you might pick up a fragment of map that strongly suggests you need to get on a bus to the other side of town in order to complete the quest. Or you could find yourself going on an elaborate and exhausting journey across the city, only to find what you were looking for outside your own front door. Anything can happen on a drift. You're stepping into a zone of increased potential and should be prepared for any eventual outcome.

One of the biggest obstacles to successful drifting is your own self-consciousness. The message of the drift might clearly dictate that you do something a part of you balks at. You might be required to steal something conspicuous from a public place, or behave in a highly unusual manner at an extremely inappropriate location. Often all that can be done in these circumstances is to go beyond whatever ingrained social conditioning your actions have disturbed and take a leap of faith in the name of magic. It's actually surprising what you can get away with in public without anyone batting an eyelid, particularly in a major city.

The drift can sometimes be hard work, and if you don't come up against the occasional "what the fuck am I doing" moment, then you're not fully engaging with the process. A useful psychological trick for getting beyond any embarrassment or self-consciousness is to put aside the intent of the drift for a moment and just consider the whole thing as an abstract exercise in deconditioning.

If you find yourself hesitating over some fairly inoffensive but extremely peculiar action, for example picking up an old shoe in broad daylight and swapping it with your own, or acquiring an oddly resonant object from the center of a busy roundabout, then you've inadvertently uncovered something very interesting about yourself. You've discovered one of the walls of your personality—something that sets limits on what you personally consider to be acceptable public behavior. What is it doing there? What purpose is it serving? Look closely at the range of emotional responses you've tapped into and see what you can discover about yourself. The process of trying to move beyond one of these tiny barriers in order to acquire a power object could well be considered a powerful shamanic act in its own right.

One of the most difficult and complex aspects of this work is knowing how to strike the right balance between moving with the flow of events and tailoring what happens towards your ultimate goal. It's just as easy to be distracted by tangential phenomena, and forget why you were drifting in the first place, as it is to be so completely focused on your intent that important material is overlooked. Getting the right balance only really comes from experience and practice—so don't be too hard on yourself to begin with. Go where the drift takes you, but always keep in mind your reasons for embarking on the journey. If you feel yourself straying too far from the path, don't be afraid to gently

guide yourself back on course. If any odd or tangential material comes through that seems unconnected to your goal, just make a note of it for further investigation at a later date—another separate drift may be required to uncover its mysteries.

To put some of this into context, here are a few practical examples of situations in which the drift can be utilized. The method is ideally suited to divinatory workings, particularly if you need to get a quick answer to an important question but don't have access to paraphernalia such as tarot cards or rune stones. A short divinatory drift can be employed during a lunch break, on the journey home from work, or in any situation where you need to gather information at short notice via non-ordinary means. It requires little in the way of planning or preparation. Simply visit the crossroads, make your offerings, ask the question and see what comes through.

A related information-gathering drift practice is the underworld divination, which can be employed in any city that has an underground tube or metro system. Begin the drift near the subway entrance and literally envision your descent onto the tube system as a shamanic journey to the underworld for hidden knowledge. You are descending to an alien landscape of white-tiled walls, harsh fluorescent lights and metal worms that burrow through the earth carrying semiconscious human cargo. Ride the tube lines until you get the answer you're looking for. Converse with its denizens, read its walls, listen to its voices and try to understand its language. You might want to leave a coin with an underground busker or beggar as payment for any information you receive.

A drift can also be utilized if you need to work some spontaneous sorcery and don't have access to whatever tools or temple space you might normally employ. You would begin the drift in the usual manner and ask to be guided towards ingredients for a gris-gris bag or similar fetish item, which at a push could be constructed from a sheet of paper or small carrier bag tied up with an elastic band or piece of string. You walk the streets until you find a specific number of items for the bag, all of which should at some level correlate to your intent. The ingredients could be anything from curious plants growing between paving stones, to sigils derived from graffiti seen on walls, to just about anything that feels right or manifests itself to you in an odd way. The more often you work with the drift, the better you tend to become at recognizing and acquiring what you need.

After a while you may even find yourself developing a "language" of ingredients to use in work of this nature. As always, resist the temptation to just arbitrarily make up a list of aesthetically pleasing correspondences. Hoodoo ingredients should be revealed to you through the living shamanic process of working the drift. If you want to cobble together a symbol system one afternoon over a cup of tea and some biscuits, then that's fine, but you're only shortchanging yourself and not fully engaging with what you might call shamanic reality. Hoodoo correspondences can't be invented after the fact. They must be revealed to you directly by the spirits, during the drift and in the heat of the moment. That's what invests them with power and meaning. If you

skip that section and just casually decide that, say, cigarette ends represent the shell of a human soul, then you're distilling all the magic out of the process. Magic takes place in the wild and unpredictable territories outside of the individual ego, and you can't get anywhere near those areas unless you relax the controls and let the material emerge of its own accord.

Once you've drifted for the ingredients to go in your makeshift sorcery bag, you might then look for an appropriate power spot to construct and charge it. If you're not yet familiar with the psychogeography of an area, let the drift itself guide you to an appropriate place. You could make offerings to the spirits associated with that specific area, or to whatever Gods or Goddesses you may regularly work with, and ask them if they will empower the bag for you. This could involve leaving it concealed at a particular spot, and returning after a set period of time to pick it up. Or it could mean walking counterclockwise around a statue or building seven or nine times with the bag in your hand, or any number of possible formulae. Speak to the spirits, listen to what they have to say, and don't make any deals that you're unwilling to follow through on.

If you plan on working regularly with the drift method, you should gradually start to get a feel for the occult landscape of the city where you live. Try to find out as much as you can about the local history, look at old maps of the area, spend lots of time drifting and get to know the landscape, the environment and its ecosystems inside out. There might be an old crossroads, standing stone, ancient patch of woodland, beautiful river, creepy hospital, wishing well, haunted castle or potent nightclub in your town. Pay attention to what happens in these places. Visit them often, speak to the spirits that dwell there and seek to make allies of them.

Accept responsibility for the patch where you live and operate. Step into the role of local magician in your area. Make friends with the powers that are already there and try to broker mutually beneficial relationships with them. Listen to what they want from you and always keep your end of the bargain. There is always sacrifice, and you get nothing for nothing. If you prove you are willing to address the concerns of your town, it will be more likely to cooperate with you. Discover what arrangements the ghosts and spirits of your city are prepared to make with you and what gifts they may be willing to bestow.

There is no rulebook or step-by-step guide to how this kind of work will play out, as it is all about personal relationships and direct interaction. All that can be given are hints and pointers based on experience. This guide has been written primarily from the perspective of the urban magician, but its principles can just as easily be applied to a rural setting or to whatever environment you find yourself living in. If you live outside of the city, you may find that information emerges via phenomena such as the flight of birds, arrangement of twigs on the earth, cloud formations, shapes made by driftwood on the beach or any number of environmental factors. Try experimenting in different settings and locations to see what comes through.

You could speculate that the series of peculiar omens, superstitions and old wives' tales that have been handed down to us by successive generations are the remnants of codified information derived via methods such as the drift. So by engaging with this process yourself, you are building a direct relationship with both the land you live on, and the environment in which you operate as a magician. You're developing a living shamanism that has nothing to do with the various re-constructionist neo-pagan traditions that flood the occult scene, but grows out of the same methods that shamans have always worked with. Going out into the wilderness, speaking with spirits, and returning with knowledge and power.